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SUBJECT: Austria's Electronic Identity Card (eID) System

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11. SUMMARY: Per reftel, Post researched Austria's electronic identity card (eID) system, the so-called "Citizen Card" (CC) introduced starting in 2002 as part of a broader e-government plan to give citizens secure online access to public services. For most applications, the CC is a chip-based smart card with electronic signature: Austrians typically use their health insurance card or ATM card, rather than obtaining a separate government ID. Authentication is through a personal identifier code (derived from a unique citizen number in the Austrian Central Register) saved on the card upon activation. The personal "source" PIN is then matched with a "sector-specific" PIN for each transaction. Austria's eID system is based on open-source standards to promote interoperability, and can be used to authenticate private transactions such as Internet banking. EU countries are working towards cross-border compatibility under the STORK initiative; the USG is welcome to take part as well, say GoA interlocutors. END SUMMARY.

12. In 2002-2003, Austria was one of the first countries to introduce an eID (the "CC") with electronic signature for citizens and businesses to conduct e-Government transactions. In 2005, the Chancellor's office established the "Digital Austria" platform to promote secure electronic communication. An Embassy representative spoke with Roland Ledinger (managing director of Digital Austria and Head of the GoA Department for Information and Communication Technology) and to Herbert Leitold, head of GoA Center for Secure Information Technology-Austria (A-SIT), which manages technical implementation of the eID system.

From Tax Declarations To Internet Banking

13. Introduced to facilitate e-Government transactions, Austria's CC has been extended to cover business-to business and consumer-to-business applications as well. Ledinger said the eID's key advantage over other "e-solutions" is that the user needs only one credential for a broad range of transactions ("single sign-on") rather than dozens of separate passwords or identifiers. For individuals, the main e-Government applications are applying for official documents such as passports and drivers licenses, electronic delivery of official documents such as criminal records, electronic submission of tax declarations, and processing of welfare and education grants and refunds. Businesses use the eID system to make electronic payments, participate in procurement tenders, conduct customs/tax business, and so on. A new area is using e-IDs to authenticate internet banking.

14. The Austrian CC is not a unique card; rather it can be activated on various existing smart cards, including the health insurance "e-card" (almost all Austrians carry one), ATM cards (Maestro network), and student ID cards. Activation and use of eIDs is via a card reader and Internet connection, by downloading "citizen card environment" software. In government and workplace computers, the card reader is often integrated: otherwise, users often need to purchase and connect the card reader, the largest barrier to using the CC at home.

Authentication With Personal Source-Pin From Central Register

15. The CC "token" is the element which ensures unique identification and authentication of the user and provides cryptographic security. Upon activation, the token contains the electronic signature and personal information ("identity link") of the user (only the first name, last name, and date of birth of the user are stored on the CC). For this purpose, a "sourcePIN" is saved on the CC, which is an encrypted derivation of the user's number in the Central Register of Residents. It is not used directly for identification purposes: instead, another derivation of this number (a "sector-specific personal identifier" or ssPIN) is created for each transaction to avoid transmitting personal data. 34 different government "sectors" have been identified that provide ssPINs. Each business which uses CC or provides CC services to customers (such as major banks) also gets a separate ssPIN.

16. For federal and local government transactions, the CC is popular; apart from e-government, there are only about 120,000 CC users (out of a population of 8.35 million). Ledinger remarked that the benefits of using the CC (single sign-on, better security) are not well-known and said the GoA ought to advertise the CC more widely.

eID via Mobile Phone/SMS

17. A recent development in Austria is using mobile phones as e-IDs. The user must apply for a CC signature online and furnish identification in person at a cell phone provider or post office; afterwards, a citizen can use the CC via SMS rather than a card

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reader. The GoA hopes this will attract more users.

Based on Open Source Standards

18. Austria's eID system uses open source "Module for Online Application (MOA)" components, which the GoA registered in 2005 (license is available from the Apache Software Foundation) to ensure interoperability with other eID systems. In Europe, Austria and 13 other countries are cooperating in the STORK project (Secure identity across borders linked) to establish new European-level e-Government based on compatible national eIDs. Our interlocutors see no problem extending eID cooperation and interoperability to the U.S. and other non-EU countries -- whether the U.S. system is in the form of a smart-card or password-based system (as long as a U.S. adopts the "logic" of MOA).

19. Ledinger said Digital Austria would be happy to meet with a U.S. delegation to discuss the Austrian Citizen Card experience and other e-government projects. Ledinger is the best contact for policy issues (Roland Ledinger, phone: +43-1-53115-2745, e-mail: roland.ledinger@bka.gv.at). For technical issues, the POC is Herbert Leitold (phone: +43-1-316-8735521, e-mail: Herbert.Leitold@a-sit.at).

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